Delray Beach Economic Development Positioning & Targeting Plan

A presentation and action items on the plan of work

City Commission · July 21, 2026

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THE STORY IN THREE PARTS

Where Delray Beach stands

What Delray is now

A wealth-receiving, visitor-spending boutique city that grew on a passive model, where affluent households and their capital arrived on their own and the visitor economy carried much of the cost of public life.

Why the model expires

The migration pipeline is narrowing, the population is aging past its working core, and the corridor with room for the working economy is converting to housing parcel by parcel.

The answer

Move the city from receiving wealth to building it, by protecting the commercial land base, claiming the founder and creator lane no neighbor has taken, and growing the next economy from the firms and residents already here.

STORY 1 · MIGRATION

Who is coming, and who is leaving

> *Delray is importing wealthy residents and exporting working-age households.*

THE DATA

$7.04B → $3.02B

Net county AGI gain fell by more than half in two years. The 2022 to 2023 tax year produced net household loss.

IMPLEMENTATION

The passive in-migration engine is slowing. The best answer cannot assume wealth keeps arriving on its own, so it turns to two levers: quality jobs for young people and protecting the land where that economy can grow.

The economy Delray already has

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Delray Beach is already a startup city.

THE DATA

45

genuine founder-residence firms already operate hidden inside the license codes with 112 knowledge-based industry home businesses, a base no commercial dataset sees, alongside 708 professional services firms and a management-consulting cluster up 40% in five years.

IMPLEMENTATION

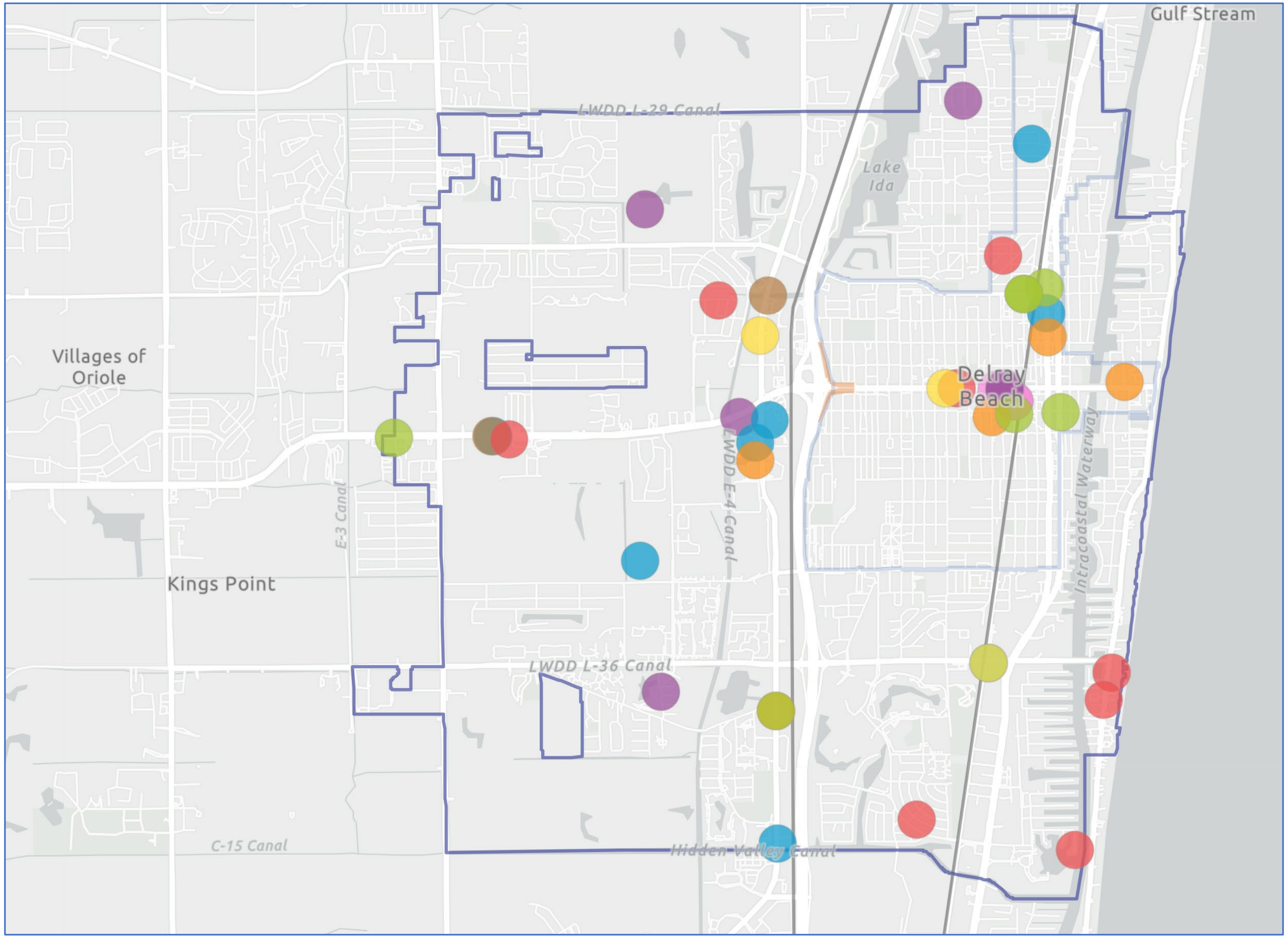
Recognize and organize the economy already here before trying to create a new one. Serve the founder base through opt-in, relationship-led retention, and protect the commercial land its firms occupy.

Hidden Economy Map

This is the economy nobody counted.

Delray_Hidden_Economy_Shapefile

- Founder-Residence
- Tech Cluster
- Boutique Consulting
- Creative
- Wealth Management
- Creator Economy
- Headline
- Digital Health
- Delray Beach
- Proposed I95 Area
- Railroads
- CRA



STORY 3 · VISITOR ECONOMY

The visitor economy as infrastructure

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The visitor economy is the economic infrastructure on which the entire competitive position depends.

It sets the stage of Delray as a place people want to be. Visitors become residents, businesses, founders and creators.

THE DATA

$208.1M

in annual imported demand, about $2,640 per resident, with 6.5 million downtown visits a year and one in four visitors arriving from New York.

IMPLEMENTATION

Protect the engine and move up its value chain. The downtown the visitor economy sustains is what made the VerticalBridge relocation possible, which makes it the primary discovery mechanism for the firms the City wants.

STORY 4 · COMPETITIVE

The lane no neighbor has claimed

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Delray is winning despite its invisibility.

THE DATA

25 to 1

editorial stories about Boca Raton and West Palm Beach in 2025, against one venue listing for Delray, in the publication of record for the region's startup and innovation economy.

IMPLEMENTATION

Claim the 5 to 50 employee boutique-firm lane no neighbor has and fix the visibility gap. It is the most efficiennt high-leverage move in the entire concept, because the product already wins when anyone sees it.

Where the next economy can grow

> *The intervention on Congress is no longer branding layered on an open opportunity.*
>
> *It is protection first.*

THE DATA

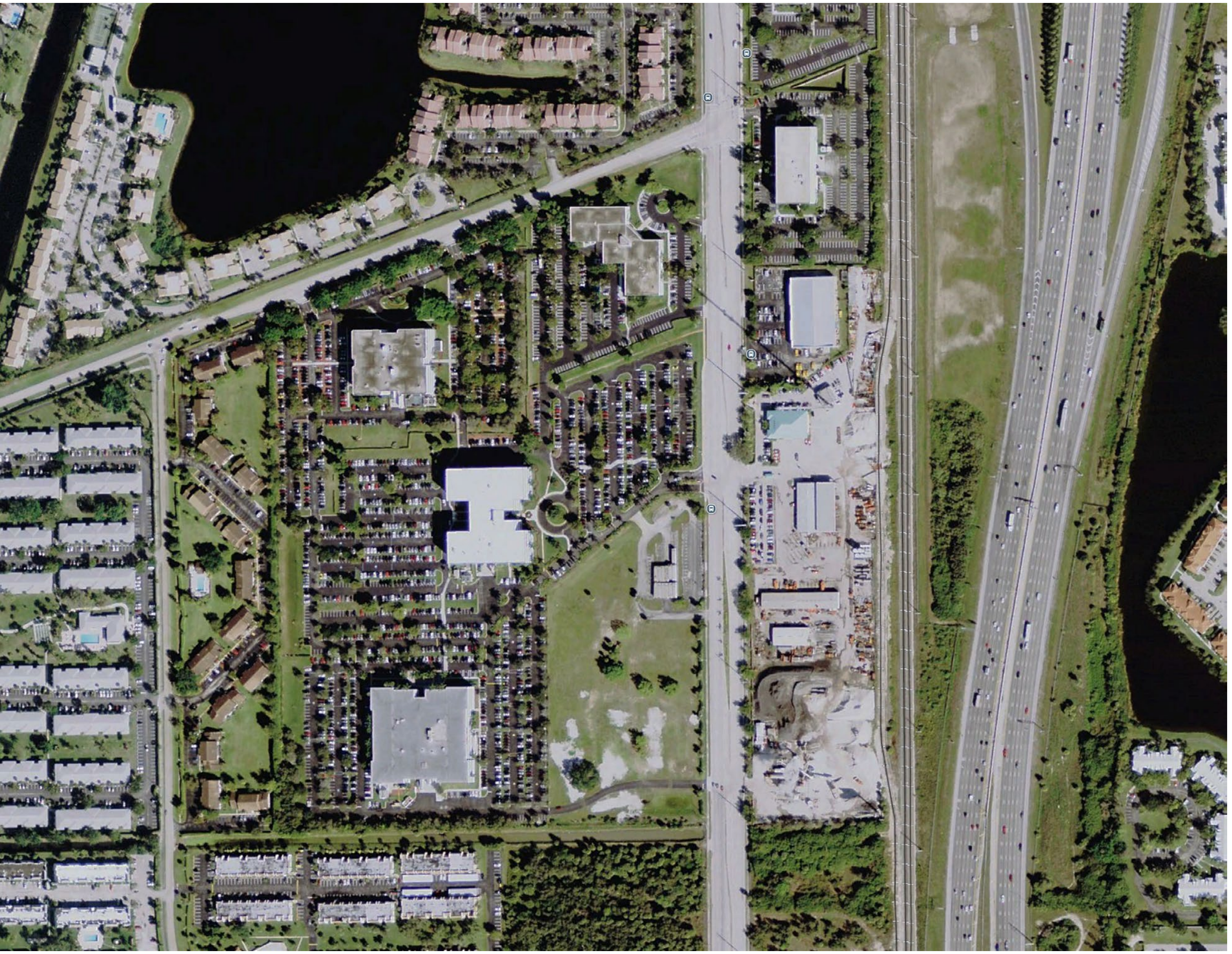
155

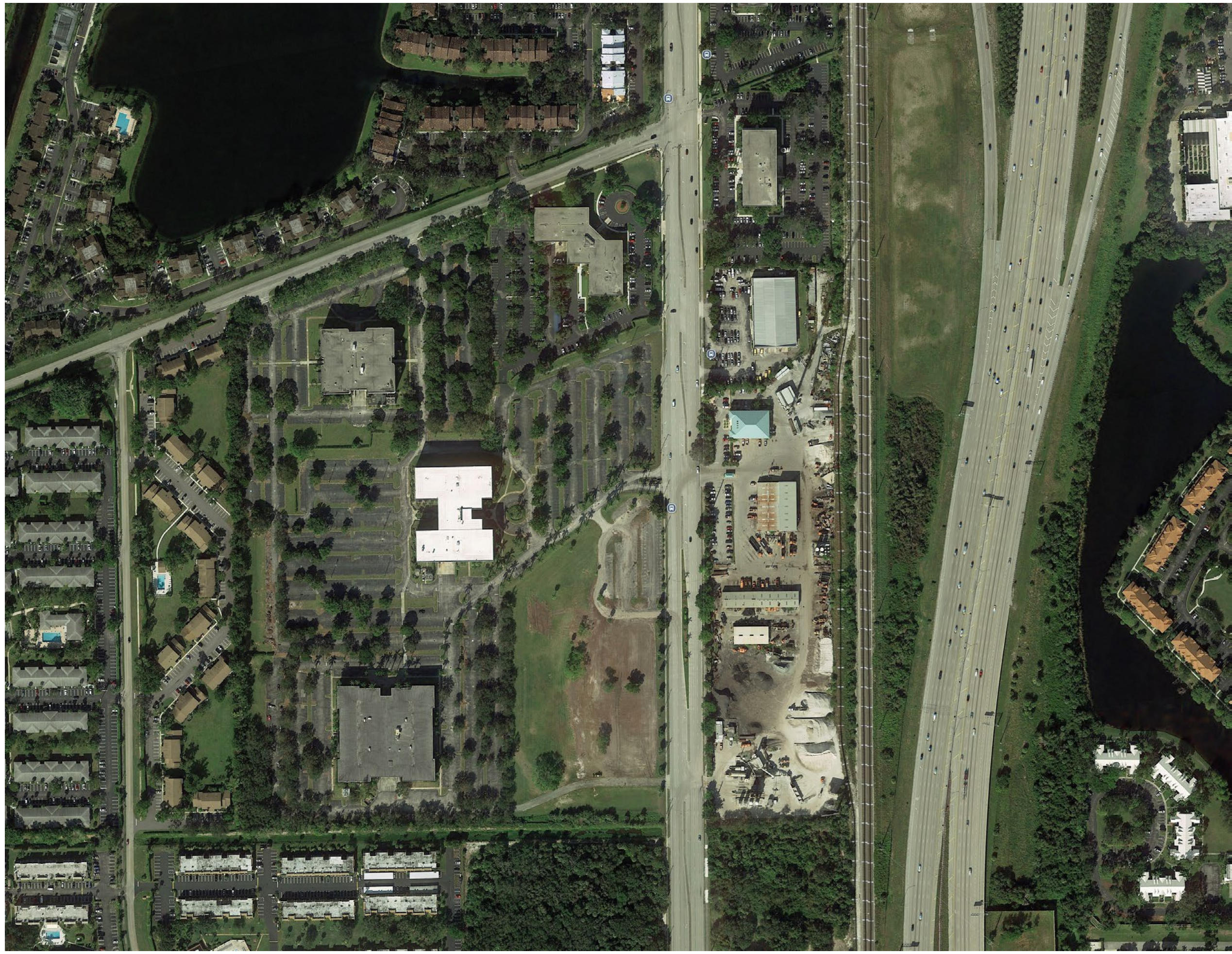
move-in-ready properties today, with 46 redevelopment sites and 93 single-family homes sitting on commercial and industrial land. But process must help product match the prospect.

IMPLEMENTATION

Congress Avenue is the working spine of the next economy, and it is converting to residential parcel by parcel through the Special Activities District process. Protect the land base first, then attract. West Atlantic is the economy's other best answer and depends on CRA action. North Federal provides the opportunity for smaller high-touch firms and talent-oriented residential infill.

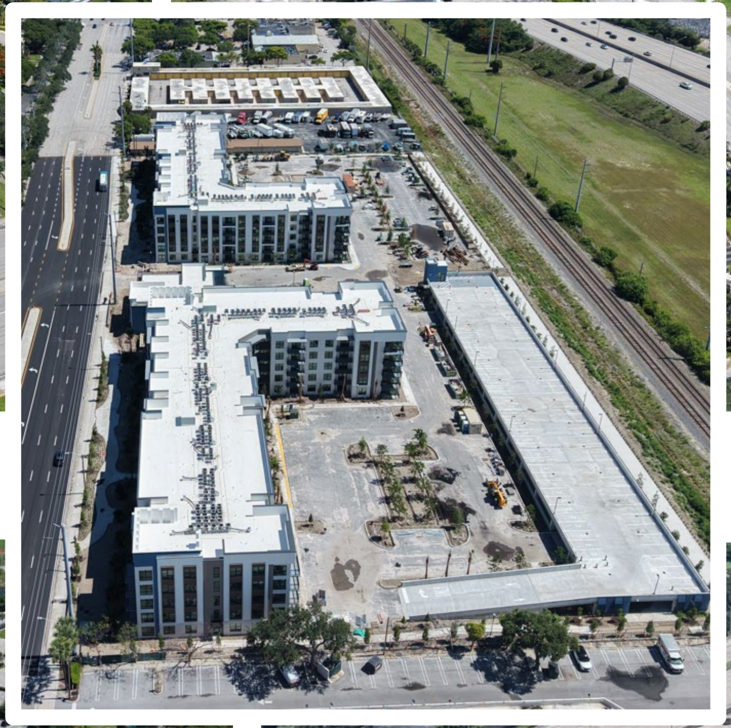
2008 Aerial Comparison to 2017





2017 Aerial Comparison to 2026





What stands in the way

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Processes and regulations should be as “high-touch” as the city’s economy and businesses are.

THE DATA

Housing is not the barrier

The market is already delivering workforce-priced housing. The binding constraint is the land competition that same residential wave creates.

IMPLEMENTATION

Protect the corridor mechanism by mechanism. The City controls the fastest levers: its own future land use language, the vacancy rule that strands economic uses, and an economic-use retention condition on corridor approvals.

The demographic clock

The demographic clock is the one variable in this plan that moves whether or not anyone acts.

THE DATA

50.3 → 51.3

median age by 2030, against a national median near 38. Gen Z runs more than fifty percent below the national concentration and the millennial cohort is a quarter thin.

IMPLEMENTATION

Delray cannot grow its own next generation, so it has to attract one through the founder, talent, and creator lane and by positioning itself as a Miami spinoff.

The priority sectors

TIER 1 · PRIMARY

The boutique, high-touch, founder-led professional services, remote-first, boutique consulting, hospitality and experiential concepts that no other city in the county has claimed.

TIER 2 · SECONDARY

Wealth management and family-office operations, fintech, digital health, and creator economy infrastructure - the sectors the market supports and the Commission has named.

TIER 3 · OPPORTUNISTIC

Emerging and adjacent activity the City pursues as it appears, including technology as a cross-cutting capability (fintech, wealthtech) rather than a standalone target. AI-enabled micro firms.

The tiers set priority, not a quota. The City pursues a strong opportunity in any tier, and technology runs across all three as a capability rather than a standalone target.

The plan of work

THE FIRST 90 DAYS

1 Protect the commercial land base

Begin the regulatory review and bring forward the amendments the City controls, with economic-use retention conditions worked into the zoning district regulations.

2 Serve the founders already here

Name the founder-residence constituency, stand up a light-touch retention effort, and fix the permitting friction that turns a simple business license into an eight-week process.

3 Claim the visibility lane

Position the city deliberately in the high-touch boutique, founder, and creator lane, and get it onto the radar of the firms and people who fit it.

THE 12-MONTH CALENDAR

Months 1 to 3

Revise the Land Development Regulations to protect target corridors, the founder directory and retention effort, the permitting fix, and the launch of the positioning and visibility work.

Months 4 to 6

Outreach to the affirmed target tiers, broker engagement on availability in downtown and Sundy Village, opportunity profiles for North Federal, and coordination with the CRA on West Atlantic.

Months 7 to 9

A customized deal-structuring playbook rather than cash incentives, the concierge function behind a fixed back end, and continued partner alignment.

Months 10 to 12

Pipeline review against the metrics, measured by square feet and capital deployed in productive economic use rather than jobs alone, and the budget-cycle connection.

The first decisions

01

Adopt the operating framework

Affirm the eight connected stories as the structure of the City's economic development work.

02

Affirm the target sectors

Confirm the priority sectors, led by the founder, creator, and boutique-firm lane.

03

Authorize the plan of work

Approve the 90-day and 12-month plan so implementation and storytelling begins.

THE DECISION THAT CANNOT WAIT

Protecting the commercial land base accompanies the authorization rather than following it.

The framework and direction are ready for decision.

Boutique. Walkable. Real.

- *From receiving wealth to building it.*

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